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Visual Art

An Art Exhibition Concocts Dreams For You at the Dallas Contemporary

By Lauren Smart Wed., Nov. 19 2014 at 10:03 AM [Write Comment](#)

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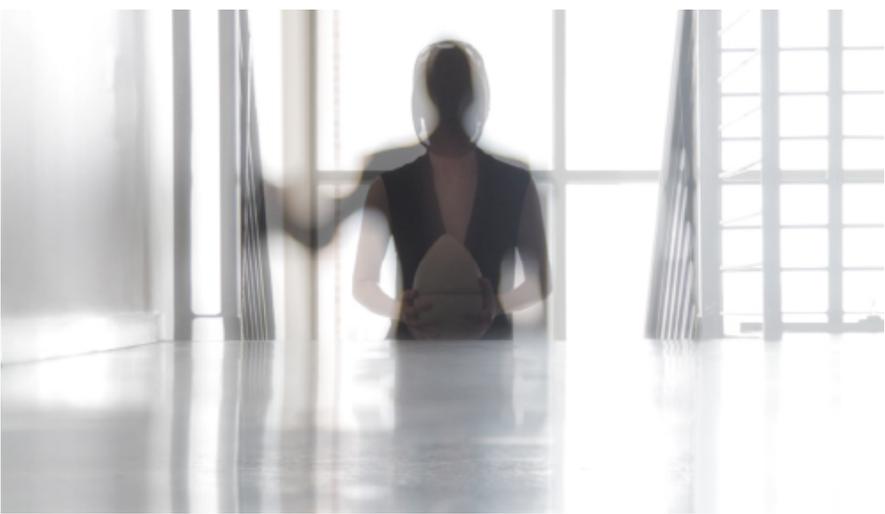
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REPLAY

At approximately 2 a.m. Saturday morning, I jerked awake. In my dreams, my subconscious has constructed a computer that fabricated dreams based on the tone and pitch of my voice, as I read poetry aloud. On this screen of my subconscious there was a forest scene, and over the futuristic speakers an immediately recognizable "ba bum" played. This dream machine (in my dreams) broadcast the opening credits of Twin Peaks. And that's when I physically shuddered myself out of my dreams.

But here's the strangest part. The computer that fabricates dreams? That was based on an art exhibition I'd seen Friday afternoon at the [Dallas Contemporary](#).

New media artists, and husband and wife, Frank and Lee Dufour concocted their latest collaborative piece by thinking about what it's like to remember a dream. "Your brain creates visions without your eyes, and sounds without your ears, what is that?" asks Frank, his French accent giving each word an extra pop. Lee chimes in, "We wanted to recreate not as much the dream experience but the state of reverie, of being lost in one's thoughts or remembering."

To explore what they could do with this idea, they began to survey friends, and scour the internet, searching for the most common dream visuals. You can imagine much of the results from your own dreams: the beach, running without moving, teeth falling out. When they began to create the video element - the art for which Lee takes much, but not all of the credit - they decided to focus on the beauty of the subconscious. Frank says he was adamant, "No nightmares."

To say that Dreamarchitectronics is just a piece of dream-like video art with a soundscape would be reductive, and wholly inaccurate. It's a futuristic installation that links the individual viewer to a computer system that molds each experience to your words and tone. Walking into the Contemporary's back room, you'll see a television screen with a gray-scale video loop, at the bottom of the screen it says, "choose an extract & read aloud. the system is listening." Walk closer and stand between two white screens, which are actually part of a noise-cancellation system. The gallery you just walked out of may begin to feel far away. In front of you rests a book of poetry selections by French author Gaston Bachelard, chosen for his interest in the dream world.

"It's a complicated system," says Frank. After he's attempted to explain the "tunnels of sound" created by directional speakers, demonstrated how the voice-activated microphone captures diction, pitch and timbre, and explained the noise cancellation technology, Lee insists that he shows me the back end. "The last layer of the tech cheesecake is the programming, the coding."

The art resides in the computer. Without a complicated spiderweb graph that connects hundreds of words to thousands of sounds and video, the system would just be a linear video art piece. The programming Frank has created that pulls it all together looks like the most complicated geometric equation I've ever laid eyes on. To me, it looks like the messiest result of my childhood Spirograph. But each line and each triangular shape is a language Frank speaks fluently - it's his art. And excuse my French, but it's really fucking cool.

When he minimizes the programming to return to the flickering videos, I ask him if I can play with it. I flip through the book of poetry, then "choose an extract & read aloud." And the system was listening, as it immediately put together video clips of a white shirt - or was it a sheet? - dangling in a window, cross fade into a woman wearing a mask that looks like one used for fencing. She points to her left. Then, enters a beach. I giggle. When it ends I remember that Frank and Lee, and the Dallas Contemporary's Autumn Hill are all watching me. "Awesome," I say. Frank and Lee smile knowingly.

It took me a few weeks to get around to seeing Dreamarchitectronics, but when I left I've been telling everyone. Go. See. It. So, now I'm telling you. There isn't much new media art in Dallas, so don't miss your chance. It remains on display through December 21, and the Dallas Contemporary is open from 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and noon- 5 p.m. Sundays. Admission is free.

If you want to hear Frank & Lee Dufour explain their technology, and trust me on this one, you do, head to the Dallas Contemporary (161 Glass St.) tonight, 7 p.m. Wednesday,

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